

VZCZCXRO6166
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHRK #0071/01 1141917
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 231917Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3633
INFO RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 0013
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 0003
RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 REYKJAVIK 000071

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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DEPT FOR EUR/NB, NEA[BRE2]/PA, NEA/IPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [KPAL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [XF](#) [IC](#)

SUBJECT: ABBAS STOPOVER IN ICELAND: SPECIAL ENVOY APPOINTED,
REYKJAVIK SUMMIT IDEA FLOATED

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a short-notice visit, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas overnighted in Iceland April 21-22, meeting with Icelandic President Grimsson and Foreign Minister Gisladottir. At the ceremonial lunch with Grimsson, Abbas lauded the contributions of small states like Iceland in the Middle East Peace Process, a theme he reiterated at a press conference after meeting with Foreign Minister Gisladottir. For her part, Gisladottir named Iceland's first Special Envoy to the Palestinian Authority, as part of the Government's increased humanitarian and development assistance efforts announced last year. Abbas cited the 1986 "Reykjavik Summit" as a specific example of how Iceland as a small state could be involved in the peace process, which generated considerable press interest and speculation. After a readout from the Ministry's Political Director, details of Iceland's new policy moves remain somewhat sketchy, but they are clearly in line with this Government's push to increase its presence on the international stage. End Summary.

¶2. (U) On April 21, Icelandic President Olafur Ragnar Grimsson's office announced that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas would arrive in Iceland that evening for a visit en route to his Washington meetings with President Bush. Grimsson hosted Abbas for lunch on April 22, after which Abbas met with Icelandic Foreign Minister Ingibjorg Solrun Gisladottir.

¶3. (SBU) The Grimsson-Abbas lunch was largely ceremonial in nature, in keeping with Grimsson's minimal policy role in the Icelandic system. However, both leaders used the occasion as an opportunity for declarations of mutual Icelandic-Palestinian support and desires for peace in the Middle East.

¶4. (SBU) FM Gisladottir, in contrast, used her meeting with Abbas as a platform to unveil several new policy initiatives, building upon her trip to the region last fall and the MFA's announcement at the December Paris Donors' Conference of a four-fold increase in aid to the Palestinian people. Gisladottir notified Abbas (and subsequently the media) that she has appointed Iceland's first special envoy, Thordur Aegir Oskarsson, to the Palestinian Authority. In a readout meeting with Charge on April 23, MFA Political Director Greta Gunnarsdottir noted that the special envoy, a career diplomat who is now Iceland's Ambassador to Japan, would travel frequently to the region to oversee Iceland's increased assistance to the Palestinian Authority. He would work closely with international organizations and NGOs already administering humanitarian and development programs in the Palestinian area. The envoy will be accredited to the Palestinian Authority and will not liaise with the Israelis. She said, "There will be a distinct division of labor" and that Icelandic-Israeli relations will continue to be managed by Iceland's Ambassador resident in Copenhagen.

¶5. (SBU) Additionally, Abbas cited the 1986 "Reykjavik Summit" as a

specific example of how Iceland as a small state could be involved in the peace process. Foreign Minister Gisladottir said Iceland would, of course, support such an idea. The Political Director emphasized, however, that Abbas' remark was meant only as an example, and not as an explicit suggestion. She added that the media had reported the comment with liberty, and had perhaps made more of it than was actually intended.

¶6. (U) Media Coverage: All media covered yesterday's visit by President Abbas in straight forward terms. Media widely reported FM Gisladottir's appointment of veteran diplomat Thordur Aegir Oskarsson (presently Iceland's Ambassador to Japan -- see bio note para. 7) as a special envoy to the Palestinian Authority. The Foreign Minister said Oskarsson would visit the area frequently and would effectively be Iceland's ambassador to Palestine. The press picked up on President Abbas' comment that "Iceland can play a big role in the peace process, as it did by hosting the Reykjavik summit." Foreign Minister Gisladottir responded that "we are going to concentrate on that." At a press conference, President Abbas told the media that "the time when only super powers governed the world was over." He said, "Icelanders and Palestinians have their fight for independence in common and the role of Iceland really matters in the Middle East." Comment: Post anticipates that editorial comment on the visit and Iceland's policy initiatives will begin appearing in the print media on April 24. End comment.

¶7. (SBU) Bio Note: Thordur Aegir Oskarsson is currently Iceland's Ambassador to Japan and the Philippines, a post he has held since ¶2004. Oskarsson will take up his duties as Special Envoy to the Palestinian Authority later this spring. He has a BA in Political Science from the University of Iceland (1979) and an MA in International Politics from the University of Wisconsin (1980), and was a Ph.D. student at Wisconsin from 1980-83. Oskarsson returned to Iceland in 1983, and worked as a researcher for a short-lived

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think tank on national security, an urban planner and a reporter for a newspaper aligned with Iceland's Progressive Party. He joined the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in 1988. In 1999 Oskarsson was appointed Iceland's OSCE PermRep in Vienna, and subsequently was accredited to Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Slovakia, and Hungary as well as the UN Agencies in Vienna. He is married with two children.

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